DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 201 SP 034 319

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TITLE A Comparative Study of 1985 and 1991 Teacher Education Candidates.
PUB DATE Nov 92
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (21st, Knoxville, TN, November 11-13, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Communication Skills; Comparative Analysis; Educational Trends; *Education Majors; Elementary Secondary Education; Grade Point Average; Higher Education; Occupational Aspiration; Preservice Teacher Education; *Student Characteristics; *Student Motivation; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Eastern Kentucky University; Preservice Teachers

ABSTRACT

This study compared 1985 and 1991 teacher education candidates on three different measures, to determine whether students entering the teaching profession today are qualitatively different from those in the past. One hundred essays written by preservice students at the College of Education at Eastern Kentucky University in 1985 and 1991 were reviewed to analyze the written communication skills of the two groups and examine their reasons for selecting the teaching profession. The grade point average for each student was also determined. Results revealed no significant differences between the two groups on their grade point average or on their writing skills. The two groups did differ on several reasons for choosing to be teachers. The 1991 group focused less often on the traditional viewpoint that teaching is a helping profession. Instead, the 1991 group stressed their concern about the future and their desire to make a difference in schools. (JDD)

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 1985 AND 1991 TEACHER EDUCATION CANDIDATES

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The Twenty First Annual Conference of
Mid-South Educational Research Association

November 11-13, 1992

Knoxville, TN.

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF 1985 AND 1991 TEACHER EDUCATION CANDIDATES

In recent years public education has received considerable attention, frequently negative. The quality of teachers is often cited as a contributing factor. It is stated that education is not attracting the best students because many other employment opportunities have opened their doors to women. These higher paying fields are attracting the better high school graduates. Is there some validity in this statement? Are the students entering the teaching profession today qualitatively different from those in the past? A comparison of present students with their predecessors is needed.

The investigators compared the 1985 and 1991 teacher education candidates on three different measures. Specifically, the study's objectives were to: (1) analyze the written communication skills of the two groups, (2) examine their reasons for selecting the teaching profession, and (3) compare their grade point averages.

Methodology

The College of Education at Eastern Kentucky University requires all of its preservice students to write an essay on the topic "Why do I want to be a teacher?" prior to admission to teacher education. All students are given an hour to complete the essay.

From among the essays written by teacher education candidates in 1985 and 1991 a sample of 50 each was randomly selected. Personal identification data including the name and the year were blocked out and given a code number to each essay. The principal investigator read each essay and evaluated it to determine the writing skills of the teacher education candidates. A six point scale based on a rubric using the holistic method developed and used by the Eastern Kentucky University Writing Requirement Committee was used. The principal investigator, a member of the Committee is trained in the system and serves as a reader for the university each semester.

Each essay was read again. The reason(s) given by each teacher education candidate for selecting teaching as a profession and frequency of each stated reason was noted. The variety of reasons given were then assigned to one of nine (A-I) major categories as shown in Table 1.

After all the essays were read they were separated into the two groups. Individual holistic scores on the essays for each of the two groups were added and means were computed. A 't' test was performed to determine significance of the difference between the means of the two groups.

The frequency of response in each of the nine categories was counted. 'Z' tests were performed to determine significant differences between the number of responses by the two groups in each category. The grade point average (GPA) for each subject in the two groups was recorded, totaled, and a mean for each group was computed. A 't' test was performed to determine the significance of the difference between the two means.

Results

Result of a 't' test did not show a significant difference between the two groups on their written communication skills at the .05 level of confidence (Table 2). The 't' value obtained on the GPA also did not show a significant difference at the .05 level of confidence (Table 3).

Significantly more students in the 1985 group saw teaching as a helping profession. Significantly more students in the 1991 group stated that they selected teaching for futuristic reasons. They also expressed a desire to be better than their own teachers at a significantly higher rate than the 1985 group.

Discussion

The two groups did differ on several reasons for choosing to be teachers but not in writing skills or GPA. The results suggest that the 1991 group focused less often on the traditional viewpoint that teaching is a helping profession. Instead this more recent group stressed a concern about the future. They wanted to make a difference in schools. They go on to stress a desire to be better than their own teachers. It might be noted that the 1991 group had a total of 119 stated reasons compared to the 1985 candidates who stated 85 reasons.

The results show no significant differences between the two groups on their grade point average or on their writing skills.

Conclusion

A comparison of 1985 and 1991 teacher education candidates shows that the quality has remained the same on their writing skills and grade point average. This may be explained in part by the fact that in general the academic background and geographical origin of students have remained the same. There is some difference in the reasons which motivated them to select teaching as a profession. One factor contributing to this difference may be the increasing number of non-traditional students entering the program each year. It is possible that more areas of significant differences might have been found if groups ten years apart were compared.

References

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching' Report Card on School Reform: The Teachers Speack (Princeton, N. J.: Carnagie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988).

Goodlad, John I., Soder, Roger., & Sirotnik, Kenneth. Places where teachers are taught. San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990.

Table 1. Frequency of Responses and Categories of Reasons for Selecting Teaching Profession

	1985	1991
A. See teaching as a helping profession	23 **	7
B. Enjoy children and/or parents	14	30
C. Previous work with children	9	14
D. Possess characteristics of a good teacher	6	11
E. Family member a teacher	3	8
F. Inspired by their teachers	7	9
G. Personal benefits	31	22
H. Futuristic	2	9 **
I. Desire to be better than my own teachers	0	3 **

** Shows statistically significant difference

Table 2. Comparison of Proficiency in Writing Skills

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	t' value	Probability
1985 Group	50	3.72	1.01		
1991 Group	50	3.58	0.95		
				-0.71	0.24

Table 3. Comparison of Grade Point Averages

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	't' value	Probability
1985 Group	50	2.92	0.37		
1991 Group	50	2.97	0.44		
				0.54	0.29